



News Release

For immediate release: January 23, 2021

(21-019)

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First case of U.K. COVID-19 strain found in Washington state

OLYMPIA -- Today, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) along with the Snohomish Health District and the UW Medicine Virology Lab, announce that the B.1.1.7 variant of COVID-19 has been found in testing samples from our state.

The UW Medicine Virology Lab detected two cases of the COVID-19 variant, known as B.1.1.7 or SARS-CoV-2 VOC 202012/01 in specimens collected from two Snohomish County residents. The lab screened 1,035 samples between December 25, 2020 and January 20, 2021 to detect mutations associated with B.1.1.7, first identified in the United Kingdom (UK). The lab confirmed the variant by whole viral genome sequencing. Data collected so far suggests a low prevalence of the B.1.1.7 variant in western Washington. Although these are the first detected B.1.1.7 variants in the state, it is likely that other cases exist and will come to light through ongoing surveillance.

“We thought this variant of concern was here and now we know it’s here. It was a huge team effort by the UW Medicine Virology Lab and required development of several new rapid tests to detect and confirm it,” said Dr. Alex Greninger, Assistant Professor of the Clinical Virology Lab at UW Medicine.

“The Snohomish Health District had already instituted standard case investigation, isolation, and contact tracing prior to learning about these cases,” said Dr. Chris Spitters, Health Officer for the Snohomish Health District. “Containment protocols are no different for B.1.1.7 variants than they are for all other cases of COVID-19. Follow-up investigation is underway to learn more about these cases and the individuals who tested positive for this strain.”

The B.1.1.7 variant, first detected globally in September 2020, emerged with an unusually large number of mutations and has now spread significantly in London and southeast England. This variant spreads more easily and quickly than other variants. According to the Centers for Disease Control

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and Prevention (CDC), there is no conclusive evidence that it causes more severe illness or increased risk of death. In a report last week, CDC estimated that this strain will become the dominant strain in the U.S. within a few months. Data they provided show that, through January 22, there were 195 detections of this variant in 22 states.

“While finding the B.1.1.7 variant is concerning, we knew it was only a matter of time before we found evidence of it here in Washington. That said, the health and safety of all Washingtonians remains our top priority,” said Secretary of Health Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH. “Now that this variant has been found, it underscores the absolute importance of doubling down on all the prevention measures to protect Washingtonians against COVID-19.”

Keep you and your community safe by following these guidelines:

- Wear a mask, even with people you see regularly and in your smallest social circles;
- Keep gatherings outside whenever possible;
- Avoid any social gatherings indoors, but if participating, wearing a mask and ensuring windows and doors are open to maximize ventilation;
- Wear a mask while in the car with other people, including with family who do not live in your household;
- Wash hands often, not touching your face, and carrying hand sanitizer for use when water and soap are not available;
- Stay home if you are sick or if you have been exposed to COVID-19; and,
- Get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms or were exposed to someone who tested positive.

Visit the [Department of Health website](#) or coronavirus.wa.gov for additional information.

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).

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If you would like to attend a short media advisory from 5:00-5:30 p.m. today, email Teresa.McCallion@doh.wa.gov.